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It is the pleasure of feeling more radical than others and the worry about not being radical enough;

the sad comfort of sorting unfolding events into dead categories;

the vigilant apprehension of errors and complicities in oneself and others;

the anxious posturing on social media with the highs of being liked and the lows of being ignored; the suspicion and resentment felt in the presence of something new; the way curiosity feels naive and condescencion feels right.

BEYOND THE SAD COMFORTS AND STALE AIR OF RADICALISM

Forward

The following excerpts comprise the last two chapters of carla bergman and Nick Montgomery's fantastic new book, *Joyful Militancy*. Though these excerpts are able to stand apart from the rest of their book, we highly recommend reading the remaining chapters for a more nuanced diagnosis of what they call "rigid radicalism" alongside more beautiful elaborations of concepts such as *common notions*, *ethics*, *joy*, and *conviviality*. For those unfamiliar with some of these Spinozan concepts, we have included a short glossary at the end of this text for reference.

Many thanks to carla and Nick for allowing us to republish their words and for a much needed breath of fresh air in these strange and frustrating times.

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-Ill Will Editions
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1. Stifling Air,
Burnout,
Political Performance

TOXIC CONTOURS

There is something that circulates in many radical spaces, movements, and milieus that saps their power from within. It is the pleasure of feeling more radical than others and the worry about not being radical enough; the sad comfort of sorting unfolding events into dead categories; the vigilant apprehension of errors and complicities in oneself and others; the anxious posturing on social media with the highs of being liked and the lows of being ignored; the suspicion and resentment felt in the presence of something new; the way curiosity feels naïve and condescension feels right. We can sense its emergence at certain times, when we feel the need to perform in certain ways, hate the right things, and make the right gestures. Above all, it is hostile to difference, curiosity, openness, and experimentation.

This phenomenon cannot be exhaustively described, because it is always mutating and recirculating. The problem is not simply that people are unaware of it—we think it is common among those touched by radical milieus. As the anarchist researcher and organizer Chris Dixon writes,

> Whenever this topic comes up in discussions, I've found it quickly evokes head nods and horror stories about takedowns on social media, organizational territorialism, activist social status hierarchies, sectarian posturing, and a general atmosphere of radical self-righteousness.

It can be risky to discuss all this publicly; there is always the chance that one will be cast as a liberal, an oppressor, or a reactionary. For this reason, these conversations are happening between people

who already trust each other enough to know that they will not be met with immediate suspicion or attack. Here there is room for questioning and listening, with space for subtlety, nuance, and care that is so often absent when rigid radicalism takes hold. These are some of the questions we have been asking in our research: What is this force? What are its contours, and what are its sources? What triggers it, and what makes it spread? How can it be warded off, and how are people activating other ways of being?

Rigid radicalism is both *a fixed way of being* and *a way of fixing*. It fixes in the sense of attempting to repair, seeing emergent movements as inherently flawed. To fix is *to see lack everywhere*, and treat struggles and projects as broken and insufficient. It also fixes in the sense of fastening or making permanent, converting fluid practices into set ways of being, stagnating their transformative potential. Even though unfolding practices might appear identical to each other from a distance, habits and certainties can take over from what was once experimental and lively. When rigidity and suspicion take over, joy dies out.

This is probably our bleakest chapter, focusing as it does on the contours of rigid radicalism and how it circulates. We want to offer up some ideas about how this all works, but we are not trying to pin it down once and for all. We have been reading about this phenomenon, talking with friends, and interviewing people, and so we hope to contribute to a conversation that we know is ongoing. We want to tell stories about it, not *the* story. We do not think there is any single cause, or a single response.

In our first attempts at writing about this, and in many of our interviews, we used the concept of "sad militancy" to describe this phenomenon, but we have abandoned the term because it has not worked for some people we talked to. Drawing on Spinoza's conception of sadness as stagnation, the notion of sad militancy has been circulating for a while, especially in Latin America. Nevertheless, we have noticed that it can easily be interpreted instead as a pathologization or condemnation of depression or

sorrow. Furthermore we use the word "radicalism" because we want to avoid creating a dichotomy between two types of militancy. Rigid radicalism is not the "opposite" of joyful militancy; they are two different processes, animated by distinct affects.

It is a bit scary to write about these tendencies. Throughout the process of writing this book, we have come up against the worry that it will be decided we got it wrong: that we are reactionaries, or liberals, or oppressive in some way that we had not anticipated. Someone will reveal that we do not have "good politics," that the book is too theoretical, or not theoretical enough, or romantic, or full of hippy shit, or naïve, or misleading, or problematic, or liberal, or useless, or, or, or. We will have committed our ridiculous ideas to print, in a permanent humiliation. For us, this fear exposes the durability of rigid radicalism, and how it can trigger paranoia, impose self-censorship and conformity, and encourage a kind of detached self-righteousness.

IT'S *THOSE* PEOPLE

These conversations are already happening frequently. Rigid radicalism is a *public secret*: something that people already sense but which nonetheless maintains its affective hold. It structures desires and movements in disempowering ways despite our awareness, and keeps us stuck in loops of anxiety, fear, suspicion, and certainty. As such, it cannot be attacked head-on.

When this public secret is discussed, it is all too easily converted into a moralistic argument, targeting individuals or groups: the problem is *those rigid radicals, out there*, separate from *us*. Some criticisms of rigid radicalism set themselves apart from or above it, as if they are the ones who truly see, and rigid radicals are trapped in a fog. The problem is that this critique repeats a common stance of rigid radicalism itself: someone holds a truth and brings it to others in need

of enlightenment. We hope to approach rigid radicalism differently, while recognizing that it is easy to slip into, to stoke, and to activate.

Like joyful militancy, rigid radicalism cannot be reduced to certain people or behaviors. It is not that there are a bunch of assholes out there stifling movements and imploding worlds. In fact, this vigilant search for flawed people or behaviors—and the exposure of them everywhere—can be part of rigid radicalism itself. As a public secret, there is no point in shouting about it. It is more like a gas: continually circulating, working on us behind our backs, and guiding us towards rigidities, closures, and hostility.

No one is immune to it, just as no one is immune to being pulled into liberalism and other patterns of Empire. The air makes us cough certainties: some feel provoked, and attack or shrink away; others push cough medicine; but none of this stops anyone from getting sicker. For us at least, there is no cure, no gas mask, no unitary solution. There are only openings, searches, and the collective discovery of new and old ways of moving that let in fresh air. And for the same reason that no one is immune, anyone can participate in its undoing.

To confront rigid radicalism effectively, we think, is not to pin it down and attack it, but to understand it so that we can learn to dissipate it. Because these tendencies are linked to fear, anxiety, shame—to our very desires and sense of who we are and what we are becoming—we think it is important to approach all of this with care and compassion. It also requires recognizing and making the other tendencies palpable: rigid radicalism is always already coming apart, and joy is always already emerging. Ultimately, we think that rigidity is undone by activating, stoking, and intensifying joy, and defending it with militancy and gentleness; in other words, figuring out how to transform our own situations, treat each other well, listen to each other, experiment, and fight together.

THE PARADIGM OF GOVERNMENT

Where does rigid radicalism come from? Surely there are a multiplicity of sources. Ultimately, we think it is an inheritance of Empire. It has been suggested to us that rigid radicalism is primarily a Euro-colonial phenomenon: that is, it is most intense in spaces where whiteness, heteropatriarchy, and colonization have the strongest hold.v These divisions induce habits of relating based in crisis and lack, as capitalism constantly pits people and groups in competition with each other. But rigid radicalism does not exactly mimic Empire; it emerges as a reaction to it, as an aspiration to be *purely against it*. When we spoke to adrienne maree brown, she suggested that it is an outgrowth of terror and violence:

> Nick and carla: What sustains it?
>
> brown: The culture that there is only one way to be radical in the world, one way to create change.
>
> Nick and carla: What provokes or inspires it? What makes it spread?
>
> brown: Terror. We are dying out here. So much destruction is in motion. I think there is a feeling of urgency, that we need discipline and rigor to meet this massive threat to our existence—racism, capitalism, climate, all of it. It feels like we need to be an army.

Empire's destruction in motion can trigger desires for control and militarized discipline. It can lead to a monolithic notion of the right way to be radical, hostile, and suspicious towards other ways of being. It forces out the messiness of relationships and everyday life in favor of clear lines between good/bad and radical/reactionary. In this sense, rigid radicalism imports Empire's tendencies of *fixing, governing, disciplining, and controlling*, while presenting these as a means of liberation or revolution. In this sense, many radical movements in the West (and elsewhere) have been entangled in what Spanish intellectual Amador Fernández-Savater has called the *paradigm of government*:

In the paradigm of government, being a militant implies always being angry with what happens, because it is not what should happen; always chastising others, because they are not aware of what they should be aware of; always frustrated, because what exists is lacking in this or that; always anxious, because the real is permanently headed in the wrong direction and you have to subdue it, direct it, straighten it. All of this implies not enjoying, never letting yourself be carried away by the situation, not trusting in the forces of the world.

In the paradigm of government, one always has an idea of what *should* be happening, and this gets in the way of being present with what is *always already* happening and the capacity to be attuned to the transformative potentials in one's own situation. Under the paradigm of government, people are never committed enough. Silvia Federici spoke to this when we interviewed her:

This is why I don't believe in the concept of "self-sacrifice," where self-sacrifice means that we do things that go against our needs, our desires, our potentials, and for the sake of political work we have to repress ourselves. This has been a common practice in political movements in the past. But it is one that produces constantly dissatisfied individuals.

Because rigid radicalism induces a sense of duty and obligation everywhere, there is a constant sense that one is never doing enough. In this context, "burnout" in radical spaces is not just about being worn out by hard work; it is often code for being wounded, depleted, and frayed: "*I'm fucking burning*." What depletes us is not just long hours, but the tendencies of shame, anxiety, mistrust, competition, and perfectionism. It is the way in which these tendencies stifle joy: they prevent the capacity for collective creativity, experimentation, and transformation. Often, saying one is burnt out is the safest way to disappear, to take a break, to take care of oneself and get away from these dynamics.

DECLINE AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

Rigid radicalism often arises as a reaction to a decline of transformative and enabling movements. Empire, for its part, responds to resurgent movements and uprisings by deploying ever more sophisticated forms of repression and control. Surveillance, criminalization, and imprisonment are used to destroy people's capacity to organize. Waves of austerity and accumulation lead to more debt, higher costs of living, and economic scarcity. Pacification through the NGO-industrial complex helps to capture and domesticate movements so that they can be managed and organizing can be professionalized. This is always at least partially effective: parts of movements get destroyed, co-opted, subdued, and divided. In the process, what was once a transformative practice can become a stagnant ritual, emptied of its power. Sebastian Touza gives an example from his experience in the student movement in Argentina:

> I think shifts toward joy often happen when people organize to do things in novel ways because there is a new opportunity to organize or because the old ways no longer work. I became a member of the student movement at my university at the end of the last dictatorship in Argentina in 1983. I remember the first years of consolidation of the democratic institutions as a period in which experimentation was alive. The people of my generation had no idea what a political party was like (after eight years of dictatorship during which parties were prohibited). Militants were willing to revise everything, were open to listen to all sorts of ideas about how to organize. Today, as a professor, two or three generations of student militants later, I see the students at the university where I work too convinced that doing things the way they do them is the only possible way. All ideas about politics as experimentation have been lost in the student movement, if we can call a movement a collection of people who rarely think outside their respective party lines. Joy has to do with a capacity for new encounters, to a disposition to new affects and ideas, with desiring differently, with setting into question the reproduction of things as they are. Sadness, on the contrary, has to do with fear of leaving the safety of a routine which let many survive, but very few or nobody at all to really live and enjoy what they do.

In times of decline there is a tendency for movements to turn inward or fixate on old strategies or received ways of doing things. Curiosity calcifies into certainty, closing off the capacity for experimentation along with its transformative potential.

THE PERILS OF COMPARING

Rigid radicalism can also take hold through comparing one's own situation with other times and places. From a certain perspective, it can be depressing to hear about places where the social fabric is much stronger, where there are deep traditions of mutual aid, or where struggles against Empire are visible, widespread, and intense. It can activate a feeling that people around us are too flawed, too complacent, or that our own worlds are lacking something: that they are not insurrectionary enough, not big enough, not militant enough, not caring enough. Change can feel out of reach across an unbridgeable chasm. This can lead to cynicism and pessimism, and a detached certainty that the here and now is not a place of joy and transformation: *revolts might be widespread elsewhere, but everything is fucked here; people are passive, and there is no real struggle going on.*

Alternatively, the chasm can lead to a desire to cultivate only one's own garden, or retreat into little cliques and milieus, where there is a semblance of safety, security, and predictability: *everything around us is corrupt, but we can live out our beautiful ideals in our own little world.* This is the creation of alternatives in isolation, rather than through combat that connects to other movements and forms of life.

It can also lead to the endless refinement of a militant ideology that provides certainty to its adherents, continually reinforced by the perceived failures of those who do things differently: *if they only understood, in the way that we do, things would be different.* These cynical, escapist, or ideological responses to Empire are completely understandable. We feel this way often. We have noticed that it happens, in particular, when we anxiously evaluate our own lives

or situations in relation to others, against a universal standard of radicalness.

HAVING GOOD POLITICS

> *But enough! Enough! I can't endure it any more. Bad air! Bad air! This workshop where man fabricates ideals—it seems to me it stinks from nothing but lies.*
>
> —Nietzsche

One way we see this measuring stick of radicalness materializing is through the notion of "good politics." In many places today, it has become common to say of an individual or group, "they have good politics." What does it mean to *have* good politics? What happens when politics becomes something a person *has*, rather than something people *do together*, as a shared practice? What happens when shared practices always have to be announced and their goodness displayed? Increasingly, we suggest, having good politics means taking the right positions, saying the right things, circulating the most radical things on Facebook or Twitter or Tumblr, calling out the right people for being wrong, and having well-formed opinions. In this sense, having good politics is similar to "having a good analysis." When analysis becomes a trait, rather than a collective and curious process, it stagnates.

We are encouraged—and we often encourage each other—to wear our politics and analysis like badges, as markers of distinction. When politics becomes something that one has, like fashion, it always needs to be visible in order to function. Actions need to be publicized, positions need to be taken, and our everyday lives need to be spoken loudly to each other. One is encouraged to make calculations about political commitments based on how they will be seen, and by whom. Politics becomes a spectacle to be performed. This reaches its height online, where sharing the right things and speaking the right words tend to be *the only* ways that people can know each other. Groups need to turn inward and constantly evaluate themselves in

relation to these ideals and then project them outward, proclaiming their intentions, values, programs, and missions.

But since one can only *have* good politics in comparison to someone else that lacks them, rigid radicalism tends towards constant comparison and measuring. Often the best way to avoid humiliation for lacking good politics is to find *others* lacking in militancy, radicalism, anti-oppression, or some other ideal. One's politics can never quite match these perfectionist ideals, so one is subjected to constant shame and fear.

When radicals attack each other in the game of good politics, it is due at least in part to the fact that *this is a place where people can exercise some power*. Even if one is unable to challenge capitalism and white supremacy as structures or to participate in transformative struggles, one can always attack others for being complicit with Empire and tell oneself that these attacks are radical in and of themselves. One's opponents in the game of good politics and rigid radicalism are not capitalists, nor white supremacists, nor police; they are others vying for the *correct ways* of thinking about and fighting capitalism, white supremacy, and policing. Comparison and evaluation of different camps or currents can be so constant that it becomes an end in itself: every encounter with a new current must be approached with a distrustful search for flaws. We come to know others—their beliefs, their commitments, their worth—based on how good they are at staking out a position.

In this sense, rigid radicalism is not one political current, but a tendency that seeps into many different currents and milieus today. In some milieus, the currency of good politics is a stated (or demonstrated) willingness for direct action, riots, property destruction, and clashes with police. In others, it is the capacity for anti-oppressive analysis, avoidance of oppressive statements, and the calling out of those who make them. In others it is the capacity to avoid work and survive without buying things or paying rent. In some it is adherence to a vision of leftism or revolution, and in others it is the conviction that the Left is dead and revolution is a stupid fantasy.

In some it is the capacity to have participated in a lot of projects, or to be connected to a big network of radical organizers. In every case, there is a tendency for one milieu to dismiss the commitments and values of the others and to expose their inadequacies. At its extreme, this generates a form of sectarianism that is fuelled by the very act of being vocally sectarian.

The newcomer is immediately placed in a position of debt: owing dedication, self-sacrifice, and correct analysis that must be continuously proved. Whether it is the performance of anti-oppressive language, revolutionary fervor, nihilist detachment, or an implicit dress code, those who are unfamiliar with the expectations of the milieu are doomed from the start unless they "catch up" and conform. In subtle and overt ways, they will be attacked, mocked, and excluded for getting it wrong, even though these people are often the ones that "good politics" is supposed to support: those without formal education who have not been exposed much to radical milieus, but who have a stake in fighting.

None of this is meant to suggest that we should be more wishy-washy about oppression, or that hard lines are wrong, or that all radical practices are corrupt or bad. Developing analysis, naming mistakes, and engaging in conflict are all indispensable. To undo rigid radicalism is not a call to "get along" or "shut up and take action" or "be spontaneous." People's capacities to challenge and unlearn oppressive behaviors, take direct action, or avoid selling labor and paying rent can create and deepen cracks in Empire. They can all be part of joyful transformation. But any of these practices can also become measuring sticks for comparison and evaluation that end up devaluing other practices and stifling the growth of collective capacities.

When politics circulates in a world dominated by hypervisibility and rigidity, there is a huge swath of things that do not count, and can never count: the incredible things that people do when nobody is looking, the ways that people support and care for each other quietly and without recognition, the hesitations and stammerings that

come through the encounter with other ways of living and fighting, all the acts of resistance and sabotage that remain secret, the slow transformations that take years or decades, and all of the ineffable, joyful movements and struggles that can never be fully captured in words or displayed publicly. Rigid radicalism is a barrier to co-learning, listening, and questioning, and to undoing our subjection (our sedimented habits). It blocks the difficult recovery and discovery of responsibility, and the capacity to carve out relationships based in trust and care. The game of good politics makes it much more difficult to be humble, responsive, and creative. No one can *have* any of this. Joyful common notions can never be possessed; they can only be developed and sustained collectively. They are shared powers that grow in and through transformative relationships and struggles. When held up as a badge of honor or gripped as an identity, they die, detached from the processes and relationships that animate them.

Rigid radicalism stifles joy: it drains out vital energies by enforcing external norms and standards, and by feeding insecurities and anxieties. The greatest tragedy of all is that it does so by converting a lived and changing radicalism into a stifling *ideal*, like a horizon that is always in view, distant and receding.

These tendencies have led many to abandon radical milieus. This is the narrowing of possibilities induced by rigid radicalism: either continue in a stifling and depleting atmosphere, or leave and attempt to live the form of life that is offered up by Empire. For many, this is not a choice at all because one's very survival is connected to the same spaces where rigid radicalism has taken hold. In this sense, rigid radicalism can be lethal. At the same time, efforts to transform all this are already underway, and many people are initiating conversations about undoing some of these tendencies within the milieus they inhabit. Others are fleeing explicitly radical milieus, creating something new at the margins of both Empire and visibly radical spaces. By breaking off with a crew of friends, some have built quieter alternatives and hubs elsewhere that enable new forms of movement and revive squelched possibilities. There are many ways

of letting in fresh air. *Rigid radicalism is only one tendency among others*, even when it is the dominant one.

When politics circulates in a world dominated by hypervisibility and rigidity, there is a huge swath of things that do not count, and can never count: the incredible things that people do when nobody is looking, the ways that people support and care for each other quietly and without recognition, the hesitations and stammerings that come through the encounter with other ways of living and fighting, all the acts of resistance and sabotage that remain secret, the slow transformations that take years or decades, and all of the ineffable movements and struggles and projects that can never be fully captured in words or displayed publicly.

2. Undoing Rigid Radicalism, Activating Joy

THREE STORIES OF RIGID RADICALISM

We want to share three stories about some of the origins of rigid radicalism, along with the ways it is constantly being undone through people's capacity for joy and the formulation of common notions. We focus on three overlapping sources: ideology, morality, and paranoid reading.

The story of ideology begins in currents of Marxism-Leninism that have animated movements throughout the twentieth century. But the problem is broader than Leninist vanguardism—it is ideology as such, and the ways that ideological thinking nurtures fixed answers, certainties, and sectarianism. In any movement, ideological rigidity is only one tendency among others, and it is being challenged by currents that are relatively non-ideological. Whether explicit or not, non-ideological ways of moving and relating recover space for experimentation, and they tend to privilege relationships and feeling over dogmatic principles.

A second story begins with Christian morality and its penchants for creating sinners and saints and for inducing guilt and fear. Rigid radicalism is stoked by a moralism that attempts to root out any shred of complicity with Empire, and in the process it often erases complexity and animates self-righteousness. At the same time, people are undoing this in a multiplicity of ways, including through ethical attunement to their own situations, and by making space for all kinds of responses that escape the grip of moralism.

Finally, the story of paranoid reading is traced back to schooling and the way that students are taught to internalize constant evaluation.

Detached from the immediacy of life, measuring everything in relation to fixed standards, it becomes possible to find inadequacies everywhere. When these tendencies take over, there is no space for celebration or surprise. At the same time, we point to some of the ways that this is being undone, not by abandoning critique, but by recovering complementary capacities to explore potential and encounter new things.

IDEOLOGY

The Militant Diagram

A major force that has contributed to rigid radicalism is rigid ideology, and its tendency to generate certainties and fixed answers that close off the potential for experimentation. Alongside the Marxist critique of capitalist ideology was an aspiration to replace it with a *revolutionary anti-capitalist* ideology. It was thought that revolution required a unified consciousness among proletarians: they needed to be taught that it was in their interests to overthrow capitalism. The revolutionary vanguard was tasked with developing and disseminating this ideology, and with everything in life subordinated to the goal of revolution, everyone and everything could be treated instrumentally, as a means to the seizure of state power and the end of capitalism.

The philosopher Nick Thoburn links this revolutionary anti-capitalist ideology to what he calls a "militant diagram": a persistent affective and ideological tendency that first emerged through Bolshevism and Leninism. It was later expressed in movements throughout the twentieth century, from Third World national liberation struggles, to socialist formations in North America and Europe, to Black Power in the 1960s and '70s. According to Colectivo Situaciones, a militant research group in Argentina, this figure of militancy is always

> "setting out the party line," keeping for himself a knowledge of what ought to happen in the situation, which he always approaches from

outside, in an instrumental and transitive way (situations have value as moments of a general strategy that encompasses them), because his fidelity is, above all, ideological and preexists all situations.

The notion of a correct party line took different forms among different movements, but the basic (hierarchical, rigid) structure was the same: a certain privileged group would help usher in the revolution through a correct interpretation of theory and the unfolding of history. Despite joyful transformations and insurrectionary openings, tendencies towards vanguardism and rigid ideology often led groups towards isolation and stagnation.

Among many other groups, these tendencies can be seen in the US-based Weather Underground, a militant white anti-imperialist group active during the 1970s. They are best-known for their series of bombings targeting public infrastructure and monuments, conducted in an attempt to wake up white Americans to realities of US imperialism such as the government's slaughter of Vietnamese people and its assassination of Black Panthers.

They also adopted Maoist self-criticism in order to ferret out any trace of the dominant ideology within their group. Criticism sessions, which could last for hours or even days, involved members discussing weaknesses, tactical mistakes, emotional investments, preparedness for violence, and even sexual proclivities in an effort to shed all attachments to the dominant order and induce a revolutionary way of being.v Even the most ruthless criticism could be justified as part of this process, and the Weather Underground developed a whole regimen of practices designed to purify themselves of any trace of dominant ideology, coupled with constant injunctions towards (what they saw as) the most militant forms of action possible.

While their tactics were controversial, they were also widely supported at the time, and the Weather Underground was only one of many groups that were bombing and sabotaging corporate and government infrastructure. What we are interested in getting at is not particular tactics, nor something specific to underground groups, but the way that certain tendencies of thought, action, and feeling

can congeal into stifling patterns. As former Weather Underground member Bernardine Dohrn writes,

> Weather succumbed to dogma, arrogance, and certainty. We were not alone. There was recovery, and amends that are still underway. But the perceived necessity to have answers to everything and to struggle endlessly resulted in ungenerous and damaging leadership, harm to great comrades, and wretched behaviour.

As Bill Ayers, another former member, explains, the attempt to escape completely from a culture of white supremacy and capitalist conformity enforced an intense, alternative orthodoxy:

> It was fanatical obedience, we militant nonconformists suddenly tripping over one another to be exactly alike, following the sticky roles of congealed idealism. I cannot reproduce the stifling atmosphere that overpowered us. Events came together with the gentleness of an impending train wreck, and there was the sad sensation of waiting for impact.

Though the goal was to create revolutionary forms of organization capable of overthrowing the US government, their ideological rigidity and norms of relentless self-sacrifice paradoxically isolated them further and further from the "masses" that they sought to mobilize. When we interviewed him, Gustavo Esteva discussed his own experience of Marxist-Leninist militancy in Latin America during this time:

> In the '60s, when I became associated with a group in the process of organizing a guerrilla in Mexico, whose members were assuming that they were already the vanguard of the proletariat because they had the revolutionary program, I was fully immersed in what we now call sad militancy. Our "program" was evidently an intellectual construction in the Leninist tradition. We had already our criticism of Stalinism, etc. but we still were in the tradition of trying to seize the power of the state for a revolution from the top down, through social engineering. We were thus preparing ourselves (military training, etc) and organizing. Of course, there were moments or conditions of joy, laughter, intensified emotion, exhilaration … The

environment of conspiracy and clandestinity and the shared ideology shaped real camaraderie and episodes full of joy, but it was clear that the experience itself was pure sad militancy, full of creating boundaries, making distinctions, comparing, making plans, and so on … How the whole experience ended makes the point better than any of those stories: one of our leaders killed the other leader because of a woman. The episode evidenced for us the kind of violence we were accumulating in ourselves and wanted to impose on the whole society. In the military training, for an army or a guerrilla, to learn how to use a weapon is pretty easy; what is difficult is to learn to kill someone in cold blood, someone like you, that did nothing personal against you … Nothing sadder than that.

The experience of the Weather Underground and Esteva both make it clear that these ideological tendencies are not just about ideas; they also contain their own pleasures and highs, induced in part by the sense of being clandestine and more aware than "the masses." Ideology is not simply rigid and cold: it can include a warm sense of belonging and camaraderie among its adherents.

This tendency has percolated into contemporary movements and groups, including those that are not directly influenced by Marxism-Leninism or Maoism. Nick Thoburn suggests,

> It is a central paradox of militancy that as an organization constitutes itself as a unified body it tends to become closed to the outside, to the non-militant, those who would be the basis of any mass movement. Indeed, to the degree that the militant body conceives of itself as having discovered the correct revolutionary principle and establishes its centre of activity on adherence to this principle, it has a tendency to develop hostility to those who fall short of its standard.

As militant rigidity increases, a gap widens between the group and its outside. But a single, unified Marxism-Leninism has existed only as a dream. In reality, there has been a proliferation of sectarian commitments to various ideologies, including strains of Marxism, anarchism, socialism, and so on. Ideological thinking is not necessarily something escaped through more and better thinking. For Esteva, one of the things that fundamentally destabilized the

strictures of his Leninism was his joyful encounter with others, and their confidence in their own capacities to respond to problems with *conviviality*:

> The joy of living, the passion for fiestas, the capacity to express emotions, the social climate that I found at the grassroots, in villages and barrios, in the midst of extreme misery, began to change my attitudes. My participation in different kinds of peasant and urban marginal movements gave me a radically different approach. The break point was perhaps the explosion of autonomy and self-organization after the earthquake in Mexico City in 1985. It became for me a life-changing experience. The victims of the earthquake were suffering all kinds of hardships. They had lost friends and relatives, their homes, their possessions, almost everything. Their convivial reconstruction of their lives and culture would not have been possible without the amazing passion for living they showed at every moment. Such passion had very powerful political expressions and was the seed for amazing social movements. In the following years the balance of forces changed in Mexico City, already a monstrous settlement of fifteen million people. There was a radical contrast between the guerrilla and these movements. The very notion of militancy changed in me: it was no longer associated with an organization, a party, an ideology, and even less a war … It was an act of love.

To experience joy in this way is not simply to feel good, but to be transformed. Esteva's experience with the grassroots led him to center conviviality and joy in his work and his life while continuing to be involved with and support militant movements, including the Zapatistas and the insurrectionary uprisings in Oaxaca.

For us, this shows that militancy is always about more than tactics or combativeness; it is tied to questions of affect: how movements enable people to grow their own capacities and become new people (or don't). Marina Sitrin consistently foregrounds affect in her own work with horizontalist movements in Argentina, and when we interviewed her for this book, she talked about her experience with the different affective spaces created by groups she has been involved with:

On a basic level, the space a group or movement creates from the beginning is key—the tone and openness, or not, makes a big difference if one wants to focus on new relationships with one another. Along these same lines, ideological rigidity and hierarchies in ideas, formal and informal, create a closed and eventually nasty space for those not ascribing to the ideology or a part of the clique. People do not stay in movements that organize in this way, or if they do it is with a sort of obedience that is not transformative and instead creates versions of the same power and hierarchy …

My early organizing experiences were fortunately with anti-racist and later Central American Solidarity movements, with people who had been a part of the civil rights and later anti-nuclear movements, so who had a focus at least in part on social relationships and democracy. Later however, when I decided I needed to be a part of a revolutionary group that was organizing against capitalism as a whole, well, I found myself in a few different centrist socialist groups which were really soul-deadening. It was all about ideology and guilt. One could never do enough, and could never know enough or quote enough of whomever was the revolutionary of the day (James Cannon, Tony Cliff, etc). It was also politically all about the end and not the day to day, that even included women, which one would think, after the radical feminist movement, [that] these groups would get that relationships have to change now; but no, it was all about the future free society we all had to work for—accepting relationships as they are, pretty much.

I later came around some anarchist groups, thinking that they would be more open and focused on the day to day, as that is what I had read from the theory, but found the rigidity around identity too harsh and since I was not squatting or dressing a certain way I was kept at arm's length—which was fine since I felt too rejected to try very hard.

Sitrin's account makes it clear that rigid radicalism does not stem from one ideology or group in particular. Marxism-Leninism has lost its grip on many movements, and accounts of such groups can sound strange and distant today. In North America at least, the dream of a revolutionary seizure of state power has lost a lot of its force, but in many cases Marxist ideology has been superseded by

other ideological closures and sectarian tendencies. Currents of anarchism can be just as hostile and ideologically rigid.

Ideology in Anarchism

Anarchism is a vibrant and complex tradition. At their most joyful, anarchist currents support common notions such as mutual aid, autonomy, direct action, and solidarity while refusing ideological closures. At the same time however, anarchists have always grappled with ideology. The early twentieth-century anarchist feminist Emma Goldman shared this experience in her autobiography:

> At the dances I was one of the most untiring and gayest. One evening a cousin of Sasha [Alexander Berkman], a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon, anyway. It was undignified for one who was on the way to become a force in the anarchist movement. My frivolity would only hurt the Cause.
>
> I grew furious at the impudent interference of the boy. I told him to mind his own business, I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown into my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy. I insisted that our Cause could not expect me to become a nun and that the movement should not be turned into a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it. "I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things." Anarchism meant that to me, and I would live it in spite of the whole world--prisons, persecution, everything. Yes, even in spite of the condemnation of my own comrades I would live my beautiful ideal.

Since Goldman wrote about this a century ago, this kind of policing has continued, but in new and different ways. While Maoism and Leninism were ascendant in radical politics, it took the form of maintaining an explicit party line. With the decline of these ideologies, rigid radicalism has shape-shifted into new forms. One of

the ideological tendencies animating anarchist and anti-authoritarian spaces is what amory starr calls "grumpywarriorcool." Rather than the militant conformity of Marxist-Leninism, grumpywarriorcool manifests as an ideology of individualistic *anti-conformity* and *anti-vanguardism*. starr gives a polemical example of the "manarchist" whose "freedom" to do whatever he wants ends up reinforcing individualism, whiteness, and patriarchy:

> "i'm going to stink, i'm going in there even though i'm contagious, i'm going to bring my barking dog, i have the right to do whatever the fuck i want and people just have to deal with it and i'm going to call this "cultural diversity" … meanwhile other folks around are feeling like another white guy is doing whatever the fuck he wants.

She suggests that privileging individual freedom is ideological because it tends to force out potentials for connection, curiosity, and a sense of collective responsibility. In starr's analysis, there are some continuities between grumpywarriorcool and earlier ideological forms; norms of fearlessness, self-sacrifice, and bravery, she argues, can end up eliminating space to express hesitation or fear. These intimate reflections can be transformative, but they remain hidden because it is too difficult to voice them in a climate where fearlessness is the ideal. Similarly, starr names "smart radicalism" as a fundamental premise of white, anti-authoritarian organizing of grumpywarriorcool: a commitment to radical principles and theories, a "correct" interpretation of them, and the assumption that this correctness will avoid mistakes. Forced out by these tendencies are friendliness, comfort, generosity, and curiosity. Outsiders are viewed with cool suspicion.

These stories are not meant as a criticism of anarchism (or Marxism) as a whole; we are trying to locate ideological *tendencies* within these complex and varied traditions. At its best, anarchism has enabled the refusal of fixed ideologies in favor of experimentation, openness, autonomy, and a proliferation of different struggles and forms of life. As Scott Crow writes,

An abundance of literature has been written about anarchism over the last hundred years. How is it organized? What could it look like? What are examples of it in practice? There are also complex critiques and analyses of it, but, for me, anarchism is just a point of reference, a descriptive word to get one's bearings for starting conversations that move to action. It describes an opening up of possibilities for changing ourselves and our communities. It describes a set of guiding principles and ideas, serious and playful at once, not a rigid ideology.

We think this conception of anarchism—as a point of reference and an evolving set of questions—can help ward off the crystallization of fixed ideology. crow further suggests that anarchism is animated by a trust in people's ability to solve their own problems and take collective responsibility, rather than a prescription for how they should do it. This is the kind of anarchism we are after: a non-ideological sensibility that nurtures trust in people's capacity to care for each other and to be responsive, inventive, and militant.

The Limits of Ideology

In this sense, Ashanti Alston suggests that the problem is not about displacing Marxism-Leninism or Maoism with an anarchist ideology; the problem is *ideology as such*, and all the baggage that comes with it:

> Ideology … comes out of having a set of answers for something. So even for me with my anarchism, I don't think it's classical. I don't call myself an anarcho-communist or none of the others. There's definitely anarchism that's open to being in tune with always-changing realities. For me, anarcho-communists got good points about certain things, primitivists have good points about certain things. Them two don't get along, but I get something from both of them. I like some aspects of anarcho-individualism, and Tolstoy's spiritualism. For most of my folks, my people are Christians or Muslims and increasingly Yoruba, Kemetic, and other African religions that they're recovering and using. I don't want to be categorized as a particular school because I know if I do, the world I would hope to be created won't have room

for all kinds of tendencies of anarchism, or all kinds of tendencies of people living their lives according to their own terms.

From this perspective, ideology is a screen that limits the possibility of open-ended encounters where mutual learning and transformation can take place. Its inducement of conformity tends towards closed, stagnant little enclaves. Ideological and sectarian tendencies offer the comfort of being able to pin things down, the pleasure of feeling that one is above or ahead of others, and the somber ability to sort new encounters into neat categories so that one is never too unsettled or affected by anything.

Undoing Ideology

Rather than becoming rooted in a single ideological current, Alston points to the potential of affirming the most enabling parts of a multiplicity of currents. Similarly, when we interviewed Richard Day, he made a distinction between an ideological approach and an *ethical* one, like Alston's:

> Day: If someone is working ideologically, they will have a pat answer to any question that might be asked, without having to do much in the way of thinking or analysis. If you ask a liberal about smashing bank windows in a protest, they will probably say it's violent and bad; if you ask an anarchist, they will probably say it's not violence, it's destruction of stolen property and quite a valid thing to do. This is similar to working morally, in that you need only consult a tablet, ask a functionary such as a priest, and they will tell you what to do and not do.

> In a critical, analytic—ethical—way of relating, it is impossible to know what one might think or feel ahead of time; that will be contingent upon many circumstances of the situation. There is likely to be much more complexity, much more nuance, less dogmatism, certainty, and purity.

> In general, I think it's safe to associate ideological ways of relating with rigid radicalism, and that's why you find that so many people,

all over the world, who are actually involved in the most powerful social movements and upheavals, tend to steer away from ideology, and orient more to shared values, practices, and goals.

Nick & carla: And not being ideological means being uncertain, as well, right?

Day: Yeah. Working non-ideologically definitely involves an element of openness, a vulnerability, not only at the level of emotion, but also at the level of thought, and of political relationships. There is a certain sort of safety in having an answer for everything.

As we insisted earlier, ethics here does not mean an individualized set of fixed principles (as in consumer ethics, or personal ethics) but instead a capacity to be attuned to the situation, to be immersed in it, and to create something emergent out of the existing conditions. Alston speaks to the power and potential of working across difference in ways that respect where people are coming from:

Different consciousnesses can come from different places … and we can figure out the dialog, how to create a way forward that respects us all, that respects the different worlds that we come from. So for me, if that had happened back then in 1970, where would we have been right now? And for me, that's such a better way to go, 'cause for the queer community, or the Yoruba community that may exist in Brooklyn, what's best for them? Whether one is a small geographical community or tied to their ethnicity or dealing with a lifestyle, we should just be open to come together and see how we can do this in a different kind of way. That's the challenge.

This is the ethics of encounter. Instead of asking whether we (or they) are inherently radical, revolutionary, or anarchist, an ethical approach asks questions about how we affect each other, what new encounters become possible, and what we can do together. None of the answers to these questions can be known in advance. They can only be asked as part of an open-ended, unfolding experiment, as markers in an always-changing world, in which we figure things out along the way. As the anarchist collective Crimethinc writes,

If the hallmark of ideology is that it begins from an answer or a conceptual framework and attempts to work backward from there, then one way to resist ideology is to start from *questions* rather than answers. That is to say—when we intervene in social conflicts, doing so in order to assert questions rather than conclusions.

What is it that brings together and defines a movement, if not questions? Answers can alienate or stupefy, but questions *seduce*. Once enamored of a question, people will fight their whole lives to answer it. Questions precede answers and outlast them: every answer only perpetuates the question that begot it.

We would add that an important complement to asking questions is being able to listen sincerely to responses, and to those with altogether different questions. The power of questions comes from people being able to respond and hear each other in new ways. It comes from hanging onto the uncertainties they generate, and the new potential that comes along with them. To undo ideology is not as straightforward as taking off a pair of glasses to see the world differently. To ward off ideology is not finally to see clearly, but to be *disoriented*, allowing things to emerge in their murkiness and complexity. It might mean seeing and feeling more, but often *vaguely*, like flickers in one's peripheral vision, or strange sensations that defy familiar categories and emotions. It is an undoing of oneself, cutting across the grain of habits and attachments. To step out of an inherited ideology can be joyful *and painful*.

MORALITY, FEAR, AND ETHICAL ATTUNEMENT

The Christian Origins of Morality

There is a second story, related and overlapping, but distinct: rigid radicalism can be traced to a Christian current of moralism, with its penchants for fear and hostility to a sinful world. Even within

Christianity, this was not the only current; it has always also been a site of transformation and revolt.

But the dominant form of Christianity over centuries in Europe was a colonizing force, seeking to crush its own rebellious currents within and to convert or annihilate the rest of the world. To be successful, the Church did not merely command obedience. Through practices like confession, it taught its subjects to internalize their own sinfulness, guilt, and inadequacy. This Christian subjectivity is one based in resentment of excess and transformation, bent on spreading guilt and shame. Inspired in part by his reading of Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche showed how Christian morality sacralized meekness and submission, turning powerlessness into a mark of blessedness. His concept of *ressentiment* names the nurturance of a deep-seated hatred and fear of otherness, *and* of one's own sinful desires, based in a stultifying morality.

Over the last several centuries guilt and shame have undergone a secular conversion, rejecting the Church for its superstition, while embracing *ressentiment*. This secular subject hates the Church, but loves its poison. The affective structures of *lack, guilt, fear, and purism* remains intact.

Morality in Movement

Liberal morality seeps into movements in the form of incessant regulation and pacification of struggles. It replaces the transformative power of dignity with moral indignation and its tendencies of shame and self-righteousness. It pathologizes anger, hatred, and destruction, turning non-violence into a moral imperative rather than a tactic. This is the morality of the cop who tells you to calm down with one hand on his gun; the sympathizer whose "support" for you evaporates as soon as things become "violent"; the citizen who says you had better vote or you can't complain. People in struggle are constantly told about the "correct" way of conducting themselves if they want to be respected and heard. The liberal

morality of whiteness converts racism and sexism into matters of individual prejudice. Conversations about violence and oppression are constantly derailed by individual emotions and the erasure of power relations where white feelings matter more than Black lives.

Under the stifling weight of liberal morality, *anti-liberal* morality has grown in reaction. The targets and the enemies change, but the structure remains, and radical morality can reach new heights of corrosive self-righteousness and punishment. From this perspective, things are always in danger of becoming infected or diluted by liberalism. Liberal or oppressive sentiments must be attacked wherever they are detected. Call-outs and radical take-downs proliferate. Indignation grows: everything is corrupt and tainted; nothing is as it should be. This "as it should be" is no longer determined by Christian priests, or politicians and good citizens, but by a radical certainty that one is on the right side of a moral drama between good and evil.

Like the old Christian morality, new forms of moralism subsist on the evils they decry: to remain pious, the priest must reveal new sins. This can surface as an incessant search for oppression and a ceaseless attack on anyone who is found guilty, including oneself, through new forms of confession, trials, and punishments. The new Other is the not-radical-enough, the liberal, the perpetrator, the oppressor.

A number of our interlocutors have pointed out how these moralistic tendencies toward punishment can end up excluding many of those who are supposed to be centered by anti-oppressive practices: poor people, people without formal education, and others who haven't been exposed to the ever evolving language of radical communities. In a compassionate way, Kelsey Cham C. shares their experience with call-out culture and language policing upon being introduced to radical communities:

> When I came out as queer in Montreal … I started to find accurate words to describe how I felt about the world. Even though this skill was my entry into more political communities, I still felt incredibly judged. It was like an ultra-heightened experience of not being

allowed in the cool-kid club in high school -- but with all new rules that I had not learned and that no one took the time to explain to me. The language I grew up with could no longer be applied and would sometimes get me kicked out of social settings. My entire experience of growing up was judged and I felt totally isolated in trying to figure out why.

As I've gotten older, I've figured out the "right way" to navigate in these communities by learning language protocol and radical terminology while dropping the offensive and oppressive slang. I don't disagree with changing language to support systems we care about. I do disagree with judging people for not knowing the rules—especially since radicals are often organizing in favor of marginalized communities who are generally not aware of these rules.

If I wanted to fill out a form to describe my identity, I could check a bunch of boxes that would make my experience worth standing up for: Queer. Trans. Person of Color. Former Sex Trade Worker. Ironically, the biggest advocates for people like me—the people ready to throw down stats about harm reduction and youth, gender queer folks, and the vulnerable people in society—many of them had no patience for me. I came into their communities looking for support, friends, and direction. I came having left abusive and sexually manipulative partners. I came in hella lost, unaware, and not very educated. But I came in agreement with their political perspectives, because I knew society was fucked from the time I was twelve—maybe even younger. In high school, while other kids wrote about teen heartbreak, I wrote about injustices I saw everywhere. I came into these radical communities wanting to make change, but all my habits and the language I had learned to protect myself with got me in shit.

Cham C.'s story gets at a common experience in radical milieus, in which language and conduct are intensely scrutinized, and those who fail are often forced out. Far from arbitrary, these rules are often earnest attempts to root out oppressive behaviors, with the aspiration of creating spaces where everyday habits and language are less laden with structural violence. In a world where white supremacy, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and other forms of violence are incessant, the desire to create spaces that feel a little safer makes

a lot of sense. Yet as Cham C. explains, they can become stifling and exclusionary in the enforcement of a "right" way of being.

What reinforces rigid radicalism, we think, is not the attempt to change language or behavior, but the way these attempts can be subsumed by moralism and reinforce shame, blame, punishment, and guilt. Morality is dangerous not only because it can reinforce oppression, but because it can divorce people from their own power. People are reduced to their statements, becoming symptoms or examples of violence, rather than complex and changing beings. Moral indignation can promote stagnation, encouraging complaints and condemnations that lead nowhere. The desire to be morally right can get in the way of here-and-now transformation.

Warding-Off Morality With Common Notions

Squeezed out by morality, we think, are *common notions*: ethical, responsive ways of relating that are tuned to the complexities of each situation and capable of supporting collective transformation. When morality takes over, common notions are converted into rigid principles, or practices that can no longer be questioned. This can be seen in what has become known as "call-out culture" in many radical milieus: the prevalence of publicly attacking certain statements or behaviors as oppressive. As Toronto-based writer Asam Ahmad writes,

> What makes call-out culture so toxic is not necessarily its frequency so much as the nature and performance of the call-out itself. Especially in online venues like Twitter and Facebook, calling someone out isn't just a private interaction between two individuals: it's a public performance where people can demonstrate their wit or how pure their politics are. Indeed, sometimes it can feel like the performance itself is more significant than the content of the call-out.
>
> Call-out culture can end up mirroring what the prison industrial complex teaches us about crime and punishment: to banish and

dispose of individuals rather than to engage with them as people with complicated stories and histories.

It isn't an exaggeration to say that there is a mild totalitarian undercurrent not just in call-out culture but also in how progressive communities police and define the bounds of who's in and who's out. More often than not, this boundary is constructed through the use of appropriate language and terminology – a language and terminology that are forever shifting and almost impossible to keep up with. In such a context, it is impossible not to fail at least some of the time.

Through its toxic performance, call-out culture can activate and intensify a climate of fear, shame, and self-righteousness. It is important to note that none of the voices we are bringing into this chapter are suggesting that calling people out, naming oppression, or creating boundaries is wrong. Because oppression is so pervasive and people's responses to it are so heavily policed and pathologized, these can be hard conversations to have. We want to suggest that this conversation is already being had in ways that are more open, transformative, and *ethical* than what morality allows for. Ethical attunement disrupts universalizing moral frameworks that would dictate how people deal with oppression. It enables exploration, collective questioning, and responsiveness that is tuned to the situation at hand.

In a widely circulated article entitled "Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable," Ngọc Loan Trần explains how calling out can feed into destructive ways of relating:

Most of us know the drill. Someone says something that supports the oppression of another community, the red flags pop up and someone swoops in to call them out.

But what happens when that someone is a person we know — and love? What happens when we ourselves are that someone? And what does it mean for our work to rely on how we have been programmed to punish people for their mistakes? I'll be the first person and the last person to say that anger is valid. Mistakes are mistakes; they deepen the wounds we carry. I know that for me when these mistakes are

committed by people who I am in community with, it hurts even more. But these are people I care deeply about and want to see on the other side of the hurt, pain, and trauma: I am willing to offer compassion and patience as a way to build the road we are taking but have never seen before.

Whereas morality tends toward universal answers, certainties, and binary thinking, Trần recovers space for openness and uncertainty in the concept of "calling in," pointing to the ways that people are supporting each other in naming harm and violence, and undoing it together. Trần goes on to say that calling in is not about being soft or nice, but instead about tuning in to the complexities and relationships of each situation when dealing with harm and mistakes:

> I don't propose practicing "calling in" in opposition to calling out. I don't think that our work has room for binary thinking and action. However, I do think that it's possible to have multiple tools, strategies, and methods existing simultaneously. It's about being strategic, weighing the stakes and figuring out what we're trying to build and how we are going to do it together.

In this sense, calling in can be understood as a common notion: not a fixed way of being or even a recommendation, but a practice that can be developed collectively, with transformative effects, and shared with caution. It is resonant with other common notions that have developed elsewhere, such as "leaning in" and "meeting people where they're at." It is an invitation to tune into the specificities and relationships in each situation, rather than falling back on the prescriptions and justifications of morality.

Ethical attunement might include firm boundaries and aggressive call-outs. It might include attunement to one's own exhaustion, resulting in a refusal to engage at all. We find that ethical attunement thrives most as a *collective* process of experimentation. Like the concepts of infinite responsibility and emergent trust, it is sustained through a willingness to make mistakes and to allow others to make them, rather than trying to avoid being wrong. It's ultimately about

the shared capacity to take care of each other in the face of pain, hurt, and violence.

There is always the risk of a concept like calling in being recaptured by liberal morality, adding a new set of norms to govern the conduct of people who are already dealing with systemic oppression: *be nice, take care of people, don't get so angry*. Therefore we want to be unequivocal, especially as white people, that we are not trying to establish new norms of conduct for conversations about oppression, or to suggest that call-outs are wrong or counterproductive. Morality can prop up white fragility, white guilt, savior complexes, and other moves to innocence. It can enforce the idea that there is some duty to have these conversations over and over, extracting emotional labor from colonized people or people of color as if it were an obligation. Liberal morality can hide the white supremacist violence pervading schools, policing, and the prison industrial complex, reducing racism to questions of individual guilt and inducing defensive reactions from white people: *it's not my fault, I'm not racist, I haven't done anything wrong*.

Morality can sometimes also be behind tendencies to *replace innocence with sin*, enabling white anti-racism that creates barriers to undoing white supremacy. As white people, moralism can induce us to loudly proclaim our knowledge that we are racist, and to self-righteously call out racism in others. Anti-racist organizer Chris Crass, among others, have argued that there is a class dimension to this:

> For anti-racist work with a middle class orientation, this then often looks like an over-emphasis on changing personal behavior, using correct language, and calling out other people who aren't acting and speaking in the right way. It can lead to a looking down on the communities that you have come from and distancing yourself from your own past by ruthlessly criticizing everyone who acts and talks like you did two weeks ago.

Crass goes on to link these middle-class tendencies to perfectionism and a fear of making mistakes. At the same time, he makes it clear

that this is not an attack on the people reproducing these tendencies, but on Empire's forms of subjection:

> The enemy is capitalism, not middle class activists. And a middle class orientation isn't something that only middle class people can have, it's the orientation that all of us who aren't ruling class are raised to endlessly and exhaustingly strive for.

Feminism, disability justice, decolonization, Black liberation, and other interconnected currents are short-circuiting individualizing moralism with much more complex stories about oppression. Stories about institutionalized white supremacy do not blame individual white people, but they do not let us off the hook, either: they reveal the ways that we are participating in a system that stretches far beyond us, and they compel us to discover ways to disrupt that system by supporting anti-racist struggles. They attune us to relationships and histories and deepen response-ability, not the the prescription of fixed duties, but by growing capacities to be responsive to a whole range of collectively formulated problems.

Common notions are emerging all the time against the grain of moralism. These conversations are already happening in ways that get beyond dichotomies of rightness and wrongness towards more complex *questions*. This can be seen when people are able to draw out other ways of being with each other, activating collective responses to violence. It can be seen in disruptive tactics of direct action, and in the quiet forms of healing and being present with others. It can be seen in the strategic use of privilege, and in the ways that people plant seeds and trust others to reach their own conclusions.

Transformative responses like these are joyful in the Spinozan sense; they lead not to an increase in happiness, but to an increase in one's capacity to affect and be affected, with all the pain and risk and uncertainty this might entail. Joy is never a duty, and never something imposed on other people. We are not saying people *should* be ethically attuned. We are trying to affirm that joyful transformation is already happening, as an emergent power that undoes moralism and opens up new potentials, sometimes even beautifully. Joy subsists through

common notions, which need to be held and tended in order to remain alive. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes in *The Lathe of Heaven*, "Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone. It has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new."

YOU'RE SO PARANOID, YOU PROBABLY THINK THIS SECTION IS ABOUT YOU

Lack-finding, Perfectionism, Schooling, Walking

What follows is a third story about the origins of rigid radicalism, guided by these questions: What makes it possible, or even predictable, for radical spaces and movements to be perceived in terms of their shortcomings? What encourages the suspicion and incessant critique that runs through so many radical milieus? Is there something that makes critique a reflex and a habit, and forces out other possibilities?

One example is learning to walk: when little kids take their first steps, people around them cheer, rejoice, and celebrate. We take photos, tell friends, and record these moments because we want to share the joy in witnessing the emergence of a new increase in capacity: *this kid is learning to walk*! But if we take a perfectionist perspective, then why celebrate? The kid won't usually walk for very long; they stumble and fall, and they certainly can't run. But no one says "Why are you celebrating? They're not *really* walking yet!"

If the kid learning to walk is just another kid walking, it's no longer something worth celebrating. Those who celebrate it are naïve, or getting a bit carried away: kids are learning to walk all the time. But in the moment, it doesn't seem naïve, because we are part of the process of witnessing *this* kid walk, *in this way,* for the very first time.

We bring up this example because it seems obvious that it is nonsensical to impose external ideals of walking on little kids who are just learning, or to approach the situation with a detached and

suspicious stance. It seems obvious (we hope) that a toddler's increase in capacity—those first steps that mark the emergence of something new—is sufficient in itself. It is a joyful moment, worth celebrating, not because it's part of some linear process of development, but because it's an *emergent power* for that kid, palpable to all present in those moments.

With this in mind, why is it so difficult, sometimes, to celebrate small victories or humble increases in collective power and capacity? What makes it so easy to dismiss transformation as too limited? What makes it so easy to find joy lacking? We see variants of this dynamic happen a lot: someone celebrates something joyful, while others offer up reminders of its insufficiency. We find ourselves doing the same thing, sometimes. What allows for the constant imposition of external norms, criteria, and ideals for evaluation?

Surely it comes from many different places, but we think part of it can be traced to the ways schooling crushes openness to new encounters. Most of us have been exposed to at least some of this for big chunks of our lives: schooling replaces curiosity with instruction, memorization, and hierarchical evaluation. We are encouraged to internalize the notion that our worth is connected to our grades, that we are locked in competition with our classmates, and that we are like empty vessels awaiting knowledge.

Not long after children learn to walk, they are often stuck in schools and subjected to constant monitoring, control, and evaluation. In school, new capacities can only be affirmed when they conform to the criteria set out by the institution; that is, when a student has learned a particular thing, at the right time, in the right way. Curiosity and the discovery of emergent connections need to be crushed in order to create this conformity, and those who refuse or resist are quickly labeled "problem" children, in need of remedial education, medication, therapy, or punishment.

Those who make it through learn to internalize incessant evaluation by externally imposed standards. By reducing lives to these external

standards, schooling crushes the capacity for joy. Adults, parents, and other caregivers are tasked with continuing this process outside of school, teaching children to categorize and measure everything, including themselves. There is always someone further along, who has done it better and more proficiently. Evaluation works by removing the immediacy of life where we can sense the unfurling of newness and potential and learn by exploring the world, following our curiosities.

Radical Perfectionism and Paranoid Reading

This tendency for constant evaluation and the imposition of external standards has percolated its way into many facets of life under Empire. It exists even among radicals: what changes is merely the kind of standards and the mode of evaluation. Is it radical? Is it anarchist? Is it critical? Is it revolutionary? Is it anti-oppressive? How might it be co-opted, complicit, or flawed? What is problematic? What does it fail to do? How limited, ineffective, and short-lived is it? Margaret Killjoy spoke to us about the ways that these tendencies can pervade anarchist spaces:

> While I think there's a decent bit of spontaneity and not-making-rules and such going on in radicalism, I see an awful lot less creativity at the moment. Particularly, I see very little creativity from tactical, strategic, and even theoretical analysis … For a bunch of *anarchists*, we're remarkably uncomfortable with new ideas. If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that happens because we've really honed our ability to critique things but not our ability to embrace things.

Applied incessantly, critique can become a reflex that forces out other capacities. The queer theorist Eve Sedgwick argues that this penchant for constant critique runs through many currents of radical thought, in what she calls *paranoid reading*. Paranoid reading is based on a stance of suspicion: an attempt to avoid co-optation or mistakes through constant vigilance. It seeks to ward off bad surprises by ensuring that oppression and violence are already known, or at least anticipated, so that one will not be caught off guard, and so that one

can react to the first sign of trouble. The result is that one is *always on guard and never surprised*. By approaching everything with detached suspicion, one closes off the capacity to be affected in new ways.

When we interviewed Richard Day, he suggested that this tendency is linked to being in pain and converting that pain into an incessant search for lack:

> In general, I think rigid radicalism is a response to feeling really hurt and fucked up. And the real enemy is the dominant order, but it gets mixed into this big soup, so the enemy becomes each other. It becomes oneself. It's a finding lacking as such … a finding lacking almost everywhere with almost everyone. And when that lack is found, then of course there needs to be some action: which is going to be to tell, or force, or coerce, or get at that lack, and try to turn it into a wholeness. So strangely enough I'd suggest that rigid radicalism is driven by a desire to heal. And it has exactly the opposite effect: of sundering the self more, of sundering communities more, and so on.

Those of us who regularly find ourselves in pain might find this paradox familiar. Through the constant imposition of external standards, everything can be found lacking, and all kinds of coercive responses can seem justified. An endless cycle ensues: no one and nothing is good enough, and this paranoid stance constantly incapacitates exploration, healing, and affirmation.

Many of us learn this mode of thought through university, or through immersion in radical spaces themselves: we learn to search for, anticipate, and point out the pervasiveness of Empire. Even without the sad rigor of the Weather Underground, we learn to search the bodies, behaviors, and words of others for any shred of complicity. Mik Turje spoke to this tendency when we interviewed them:

> I think as a youth I was really idealistic, and I came to the university context, and critical theory, where idealism and imagining something better was stamped out as something naïve. The only option was to master the hypercritical language myself, and one-upping people. I got really good at that. I won all of the political arguments in school, but … I was being a shitbag of a militant, tearing everyone down.

By being immersed in paranoid reading, people learn to find themselves and others lacking. Having been "educated," one becomes a pedagogue oneself, spreading the word about Empire, oppression, and violence, and in the process one tends to position others as naïve and ignorant.

This is clear in how surprise and curiosity are often *infantilized* by Empire. They are treated as foolish or "childish"—that is, lacking the *educated, rational, civilized, adult* capacities of detached evaluation. Paranoid reading and its association with adulthood and rational detachment are transmitted through schooling, founded on patriarchal white supremacy. Based on suspicion, perfectionism, and the penchant for finding flaws in ourselves and others, paranoid reading prevents us from being joyfully in touch with the world and with the always already present potential for transformation.

Crucially, paranoid reading and lack-finding have their own affective ecology, with their own pleasures and rewards. There can be a sense of satisfaction in being the one who anticipates or exposes inadequacy. There can be safety and comfort in a paranoid stance, because it helps ensure that we already know what to do with new encounters. Incessantly exposing flaws can be pleasurable, and can even become a source of belonging.

We think this is at the heart of what destroys the transformative potential of movements from within: the capacity for paranoid reading closes off the capacity to embrace and be embraced by new things. The stance of detached judgment means remaining at a distance from what is taking place. In contrast, experimentation requires openness and vulnerability, including the risk of being caught off guard or hurt. From a paranoid perspective, things like gratitude, celebration, curiosity, and openness are naïve at best, and potentially dangerous. When everything is anticipated, or one can see immediately how something is imperfect or lacking, one misses the capacity to be affected and *moved*.

Holding Ambivalence

Beyond mere happiness, what is being crushed by paranoid reading and lack-finding is all the ambivalence and messy intensity of transformation. Walidah Imarisha evokes this powerfully in her book, *Angels With Dirty Faces*, in which she shares the moment when she and other prison abolition organizers learned that Haramia, one of their imprisoned comrades, has had his death sentence commuted after a long struggle:

> "The governor commuted his sentence!" Haramia's campaign organizer smiled brighter than the sun beating down on us.
>
> "It's the first time Perry ever did it! The Board of Pardons voted 6-1 for clemency – they haven't voted to stop an execution in 25 years.
>
> We did it! We won!"
>
> Silence. Incredulousness. Too scared to believe, to hope.
>
> Then the explosion – yelling, hugging, crying […]
>
> They commuted Haramia's sentence to life in prison. On an LA radio interview, I spoke of this victory. A woman called in: "But he's still in prison, for life. Isn't that a death sentence too? How can you call this a win?"
>
> I paused. "We won a battle in the larger war. We know that tomorrow we have to get up to continue. Tonight we celebrate. We celebrate that tomorrow, Haramia will see another dawn. Today … today was a good day."
>
> We took over the prison yard, the supporters. Sprawled out on the grass. Screamed the good news into cell phones. Fell into each other's arms, laughing. Unable to give words to my feelings, I somersaulted

across the prison lawn. It was the first time I ever felt truly joyous in a prison yard, without a sense of dread and sadness nestled underneath.

It was the only time I saw guards do absolutely nothing as we broke every prison conduct rule, written and unwritten. They knew we won that day.

I couldn't help but feel Hasan's* presence. Smiling his child-like grin. Whispering softly, "Yeah, Wa Wa, enjoy it now.

"Tomorrow we got a lot more work to do."

Imarisha's story evokes the intensity of this moment, palpable even to the prison guards: it was enough to disrupt, if only for a few moments, the brutal and arbitrary rules of the prison. The event punched a hole in the ultra-controlled space of the prison.

Imarisha makes clear the importance of celebration, even as the ambivalence of the victory was obvious. Only from a perspective of comparative evaluation and paranoid reading is it possible to remind oneself and others that the key point to focus on is that Haramia is still in prison, or that the prison industrial complex is still intact. Only when viewed from a distance, without the investments and connections of those involved, could one think that this celebration is naïve or unfounded. Imarisha spoke to this when we interviewed her:

In a society that fits everything into dichotomy, you win or you lose. There is no space for a win that is attached to a loss. In the case of Haramia KiNassor, whose death sentence was commuted, it was an immense win to have that brotha still with us. And other people were executed that same week by the state of Texas. And his comrade Hasan Shakur who was also my close compañer@ was executed almost a year before to the day. So for me the win and loss of the situation was ever present, breathing together. And it's really hard to hold both of those.

Imarisha's words reveal the capacity to hold on to intensity and ambivalence, without parsing it into a binary between "feeling

good" and "feeling bad," or setting optimism against pessimism. To be capable of holding all of this—of wins attached to losses, and joys attached to sorrows—is fundamentally about being *affected*. It is about inhabiting a world of uncertainty and complexity, about feeling and participating in emergent and collective powers. Joy.

What all of this makes clear to us is that there is no formula for a break with paranoid reading: there is only the discovery and renewal of ways of moving and relating, right where we are, in our own lives. To undo paranoid reading entails more than "being nice" or "not alienating people." It can be about openness to new encounters and putting relationships before ideas. It requires challenging the corrosive tendency that impels us to find lack everywhere, to outmeasure, to out-preach, and to be on guard against mistakes and the unexpected. It entails recovering the capacities to celebrate and to be surprised.

Limits of Critique: From Paranoia to Potential

Radical and incisive critique is an indispensable weapon. In a world where we are enmeshed in forms of subjection, critique can support resistance and transformation. It can be a source of intimate reflection, unpacking things that are already sensed intuitively. By revealing that things have not always been this way, and that they could be different, critique can create wiggle-room for struggle. At the same time, when reduced to a habit, a reflex, or an end in itself, critique can become stifling and paranoid. And, we must admit, pointing to paranoid reading and perfectionism can itself become a new form of paranoia: a critique of critique.

These are the limits of critique. Critique can be helpful for asking how subtle dynamics manifest themselves, or for questioning inherited

ways of doing things, but it doesn't necessarily activate capacities to be different with each other.

For this reason, we want to emphasize the potential of affirmative theory, as a *complementary power* which might help ward off paranoia. We talked to Silvia Federici about this because we have been struck by the way she combines an incisive critique of Empire with an incredible generosity towards movements. Her approach is not about being positive all the time, but about the *potential* of struggle:

> carla and Nick: Another thing that we wanted to talk to you about is the style and tone of intellectual engagement. You have a really militant critique of capitalism, but you're always pointing to inspiring examples in a range of different movements and you seem to reserve critique, in terms of a really pointed attack, for large destructive institutions like the World Bank. So we wanted to ask: is this style something that you've cultivated and that you're intentional about? And maybe more generally, can you talk about the potential of theory in intellectual work today? What makes theory enabling and transformative, and what gets in the way of that?

> Federici: It's partially a consequence of growing old. You understand things that when you're younger you didn't see. One thing that I've learned is to be more humble and hold my judgment of people until I know them beyond what I can make out from what they say, realizing that people often say foolish things that they do not really believe or have not seriously thought about.

> It also comes from recognizing that we can change, which means that we should stress our potential rather than our limits. One of the most amazing experiences in the women's movement was to see how much we could grow, learning to speak in public, write poetry, make beautiful posters. All this has given me a strong distaste for the impulse to squash everything at the first sign that something is not right.

> I've made it a principle not to indulge in speech that is destructive. Striving to speak clearly, not to make people feel like fools because they don't understand what I say, is a good part of it. That's also something

I've taken from the women's movement. So many times we had felt humiliated, being in situations where we didn't understand what men had said and didn't have the courage to ask what they meant. I don't want to make other people ever feel this way.

The notion of stressing potential, rather than limits, seems very important to us. This is not just a shift in focus, but a whole different orientation. Limits are often spoken of as if they are fixed, and paranoid reading specializes in locating them and pointing them out. But limits are never fixed. Limits are the always shifting edges of what we are, what we are capable of. To explore potential is to live right at these fluid edges. Affirmative reading is rooted in Spinoza's insight that we do not know in advance what a body—or a movement or struggle—can *do*. This ignorance is what makes experimentation possible. *Potential* is the dimension of these unfolding encounters that can never be known beforehand.

To replace paranoid reading with affirmation is about activating a power complementary to critique, without giving up on critical thinking. Reading affirmatively and seeking out potentials can be a way for us to find new resonances and experiment with concepts in new ways. Critique—as the questioning of inherited certainties and habits—might be necessary to remove the obstacles to all this exploration. It might tear apart some of the rigidities that make experimentation difficult. But it can fall into a paranoid search for problems, detached from the immediacy of life and the potential of new encounters. Maybe some paranoia is necessary—just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you. Maybe it is a question of dosage and mixture, timing and framing, of combining critique and curiosity, wariness and exploration. We are not sure.

Towards New Encounters

Wherever they appear, common notions and transformative movements can fall prey to rigid radicalism. The shift can be subtle: what worked in a particular place and time can be converted into a fixed how-to list. A sense of experimentation and vitality can

be sucked out of the air with a few words that induce a sense of paranoia and lack-finding. The shared capacity for encounters across difference can be converted into moral certainty and guilt-mongering. What was initially transformative in one context can be held up as *the* answer, a new duty, or a new set of responsibilities that are imposed on others. This can even manifest as a rigid insistence on autonomy and individual freedom that crushes the potential for collective responsibility and action.

Ethics and uncertainty cannot survive long in an atmosphere of stagnation and rigidity. Detached from the transformative relationships that animate them, common notions become fixed principles dropped on other people's heads. They remain enabling and ethical only insofar as they retain the capacity to activate response-ability: the capacity to ask, over and over again, what might move things here and now, and to really take pause and listen to each other deeply. All of this is to say that ethical attunement, experimentation, and common notions are powerful, fragile, and precious. These sensibilities are already emerging in a lot of places, as people figure out how to sustain and defend joy against the crushing tendencies of both Empire and rigid radicalism.

Paranoid reading, moralism, and ideology aren't going anywhere, and even naming and criticizing them can be ways of slipping into their poisonous grip, giving one a sense of superiority, of being *above* all those things. The critique of rigid radicalism can manifest as a new way of finding mistakes, or as contempt for places and people (including oneself) where rigid radicalism takes hold. It can become a paranoid critique of paranoia itself: criticism might be helpful to get a little distance from stifling and hurtful dynamics, or in figuring out how they work, but it will not necessarily activate other ways of being. Critiques are no use unless they create openings for joy and experimentation, and for feeling and acting differently. For us, the best way to do this analytically has been to affirm that openings are

already happening and always have been, and that it is worth being grateful for these powerful legacies.

In our own experience and in talking to others, becoming otherwise is never a linear passage from one way of being to another, but a slow, uneven, messy process. Sometimes something new emerges only in the wreckage after groups have torn each other apart, or have people "burnt out." Sometimes the flight from paranoid reading flips over into an everything-is-awesome attitude that refuses all forms of discernment and critique. Sometimes people sense that things are not working, find bits of joy, but then rigid radicalism takes over again in another guise. Sometimes a dramatic event leads to new common notions and joyful ways of relating, and rigid radicalism loses its grip. Sometimes people abandon rigid radicalism in favor of an attempt to live a "normal" life under Empire. Sometimes people travel and their encounters leave them changed, more capable of cultivating collective power and experimentation. There is no blueprint, no map for moving in other ways.

In telling these stories, we have tried to avoid generating prescriptions for others, and we hope to have made space for a proliferation of other stories about rigid radicalism, especially those about how and where people have been able to undo it or relate differently. New potentials can be activated by continuing these conversations with each other.

Ultimately, we think, what is at stake in undoing rigid radicalism is joyful transformation: a proliferation of forms of life that cannot be governed by Empire nor stifled by rigid radicalism. To be militant about this is to nurture and defend these shared powers that grow through people's capacities to tune into their own situations, to remain open and experimental, and to recover and invent enabling forms of combat and intimacy.

3. Glossary

Affect

Affect is at the heart of Spinoza's philosophy of a "world in the making," in which things are defined not by what they are but by what they do: how they affect and are affected. To attend to affect means becoming attuned to the relations and encounters that compose us, right here and right now. To be affected intensely won't feel straightforwardly good or happy because intense affects are what transform, undo, and remake us. Emotions are a capturing of affect—a way of registering some of the forces that compose us. There can be no handbook for affect, because each encounter—each transition we undergo—is unique. No one knows what a body is capable of, and one only learns by experimenting: by becoming capable of new things. The capacity to affect and be affected leads to questions at the heart of this book: how do we affect each other? How can we become more capable, attuned, and alive together? What gets in the way of all this, and how might some of these obstacles be affective: intertwined with our comfort, safety, happiness, habits and pleasures?

Common notions

Common notions are not fixed ideas but shared thinking-feeling-doings that support joyful transformation. As such, they require uncertainty, experimentation, and flexibility amidst changing circumstances, and they exist in tension with fixed systems of morality and ideology. Common notions are processes through which people figure things out together and become active in joy's unfolding, learning to participate in and sustain new capacities. We suggest that trust and responsibility can be emergent and relational common notions, rather than fixed duties. In a certain way, common notions are fragile: if they are turned into fixed ways of doing things

or moral commandments, detached from the ethical responsiveness that animated them, they die.

Conviviality

To undo Empire's radical monopolies entails participating in convivial forms of life: assemblages of tools, feelings, infrastructures, habits, skills, and relationships that enable and support the flourishing of creativity, autonomy, collective responsibility, and struggle. Conviviality gets at the way in which people are able to figure out things for themselves, from transformative justice that undoes dependence on cops and courts, to regenerative forms of subsistence that support a diversity of non-human critters, to alternatives to school that enable intergenerational learning, to all of the innumerable ways that people are reviving and inventing ways of living and dying that break Empire's monopoly over life today.

Empire

Empire is the name for the organized catastrophe in which we live today. It is not really an "it" but a tangle of habits, tendencies, and apparatuses that sustain exploitation and control. We argue that it entrenches and accumulates sadness: it crushes and co-opts forces of transformation and detaches people from their own powers and capacities. It keeps us passive, stuck in forms of life in which everything is done to us or for us. This takes place through overt violence and repression, and the entrenchment of hierarchical divisions like heteropatriarchy and racism, by inducing dependence on institutions and markets, and by affective control and subjection.

Ethics

We suggest that ethics—and ethical attunement—is an enabling alternative to morality. Ethics is a space that lies beyond morality

and an anything-goes relativism. This conception runs against the grain of many standard definitions of ethics that basically conceive it as an individual version of morality (ethical consumption, ethical principles, and other rules to live by). Rather than a fixed set of principles, ethics means becoming attuned to the complexity of the world and our immersion in it. It means actively working on and reshaping relationships, cultivating some ties and severing others, and figuring out how to do without the fixed rules of ideology or morality. It entails the capacity for responsibility, not as a fixed duty, but as response-ability—the capacity to be responsive to relationships and encounters. Compared to morality, ethics entails more fidelity to our relations in their immediacy—to all the forces that compose us and affect us—not less.

Forms of life

The concept of a "form of life" is borrowed from Tiqqun, and we have used it synonymously with "worlds," without unpacking it rigorously, in favor of focusing on other concepts. Every form of life has an affective and ethical consistency. A form of life is irreducible to the people, practices, desires, and feelings that compose it— inseparable from the way people feel, from the questions they have, from their subtle gestures, from the place where they live and the non-human elements there. Forms of life are not stable units that can be represented with precision, with a fixed inside and outside; instead, they are patterned relations in movement. In this sense, the concept of a form of life orients us to the texture of life here and now. The forms of life proper to Empire are characterized by a paradoxical attenuation of intensity and joy—the very things that subtend forms of life. Empire's apparatuses of subjection nurture an attenuated form of life in which desire is turned against itself and subjects remain stuck in loops of anxiety, dependence, fear, evaluation, and categorization. One cannot imagine oneself into a different form of life, or plan it out. Connecting with other forms of life entails entanglement with transformative capacities and the values, penchants, and relations that go along with them. These other

affective worlds are always in the making in the cracks of Empire: people are inventing and recovering ways of living and relating that are joyful and transformative, through which they are exploring new capacities together.

Freedom

Freedom means finding the transformative potential in our own situations and relationships. This is very different from conventional, Western, patriarchal definitions of freedom, which tend to conceive it as a state of being uninhibited, unaffected, unhindered. This "free" individual of Empire is a form of subjection invented by capitalism and the state, enclosing us in a trap of market-mediated choices, contracts, and the refinement of our individual preferences. From the relational perspective we are advocating, freedom cannot be an escape from all connections and relations, or any destination; it can only mean finding room to move in the present. Finding the wiggle-room of freedom is joyful: a collective increase in capacity to work on relationships. It is in this sense that we argue that friendship and kinship are the basis of freedom: intimate, durable, fierce bonds with others that undo us, remake us, and create new capacities together.

Ideology

In the broad sense that we use it here, ideology means having a pre-existing set of answers for political questions. This can be a capitalist ideology that sees everything in terms of individual preferences and self-interest; or a Marxist ideology that evaluates everything in terms of whether or not it will lead to a workers' revolution; or any other perspective that uses a fixed system of thought to evaluate and manage encounters. By sorting unfolding events into categories, everything becomes recognizable and thus one is closed off from the capacity to be affected intensely and transformed. To be transformed by an encounter, in contrast, is to be affected in a way that is disorienting and undoes some of the habits, categories, and perceptions enabled

by ideology. To undo ideology requires a kind of thinking-feeling that is relatively open and vulnerable.

Joy

From Spinoza, joy means an increase in a body's capacity to affect and be affected. It means becoming capable of feeling or doing something new; it is not just a subjective feeling, but a real event that takes place. In this sense it is different from happiness, which is one of many potential ways a body might turn joy into a subjective experience. This increase in capacity is a process of transformation, and it might feel scary, painful, and exhilarating, but it will always be more than just the emotions one feels about it. It is the growth of shared power to do, feel, and think more.

Militancy

We want to revalue militancy as fierce conviction in which struggle and care, fierceness and tenderness, go hand in hand. This emergent militancy is enabled by supportive and transformative relationships, which undo the stultifying forms of subjection inculcated by Empire. This is different from the militancy associated with strains of Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, and other currents that, historically, have been criticized for machismo, coldness, and vanguardism. At the same time, there are nascent tendencies of joyful militancy everywhere, including movements associated with rigidity. As something that comes out of and depends on relationships, joyful militancy is not a fixed perspective or an ideal to aspire to, but a lived process of transformative struggle.

Morality

Morality is the fixing of a division between good and evil that is divorced from the the intense uniqueness or singularity of situations,

and the potentials therein. As such, it is a form of subjection that divorces us from our ability to be responsive to changing conditions, offering up rigid divisions between good and evil. We focus in particular on the rise of a liberal morality inherited from Christianity, which upholds the status quo and constantly regulates and pathologizes resistance and otherness. We suggest that an anti-liberal, radical morality has grown in reaction, attempting to turn the tables by pathologizing Empire and rooting out any form of complicity with it. This is a poisonous trap: anti-liberal morality purports to be against Empire, but it smuggles in penchants for guilt, shame, and self-righteousness, leading to new forms of radical policing and regulation in radical movements and spaces.

Sadness

Sadness is the reduction of one's capacity to affect and be affected. It is not necessarily about feeling unhappy or despairing, but about the ways that a body loses capacities, becoming more closed-off or inhibited. Because we found it is so easily conflated with sorrow, we tend to use words like stifling, stultifying, depleting, deadening, and numbing to get at the affections of sadness. Sadness can never be escaped or avoided completely; all things wax, wane, and change.

Subjection

Subjection gets at the ways that power does not merely oppress its subjects from above, but composes and creates them. People are not simply being tricked into participating in Empire's stifling forms of life, nor are we "choosing" to do so, as if we could simply opt out. On the contrary, under certain sets of conditions, people can be made to desire fascism, repression, and violence even if these forces are killing them. This form of power cannot simply be opposed because it is the condition of our existence; it is part of who we are and what we want, and our habits and pleasures have been shaped by it. For example, the promise of happiness through consumption can make

us chase after experiences or objects that deplete us even though they are pleasurable, closing off our capacity to be affected otherwise. In a different way, social media trains its subjects into perpetual performance of an online identity, and the anxious management of our profiles closes us off from other forms of connection. Rigid radicalism induces a hypervigilant search for mistakes and flaws, stifling the capacity for experimentation. None of these modes of subjection dictate how exactly subjects will behave; instead they generate tendencies or attractor points which pull subjects into predictable, stultifying orbits. Resisting or transforming these systems is never straightforward, because it means resisting and transforming one's own habits and desires. It means surprising both the structure and oneself with something unexpected, new, and enabling.